

This edition of Voices of Excellence reflects back to June 19, also known as Juneteenth, and its local and national significance. Although recognition of Juneteenth as a national holiday is long overdue, this edition explores the importance of celebrating Juneteenth and understanding its roots in American history.

Juneteenth honors the end of slavery in the United States. It marks the day in 1865, two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed, when federal troops arrived in Texas to take control of the state and ensure all enslaved people were freed. Although it is considered the longest-standing African American holiday, widespread national focus on Juneteenth has increased substantially in recent years; it only officially became a federal holiday this year, when, on June 17, 2021, President Biden signed a bill into law deeming it so. Juneteenth is the first new federal holiday since Martin Luther King Jr. Day was adopted in 1983.

QUOTE OF THE QUARTER

“Juneteenth has never been a celebration of victory or an acceptance of the way things are. It’s a celebration of progress. It’s an affirmation that despite the most painful parts of our history, change is possible—and there is still so much work to do.”

—President Barack Obama

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Syracuse Juneteenth Parade

By Caitlyn Ford, Associate

On June 19, 1865, the United States Army, under the leadership of Major General Gordon Granger, entered Galveston, Texas. Although it was more than two and a half years after President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, it’s estimated that 250,000 African Americans remained enslaved. In accordance with the proclamation, on this day, Major General Granger announced to the people of Texas that all enslaved people were free. The celebration that ensued became known as Juneteenth.

Prior to the celebration of Juneteenth, the African Americans living in Central New York celebrated what is referred to as the “Emancipation Jubilee” around January 1, the day on which the Emancipation Proclamation technically took effect. The first Emancipation Jubilee held in Syracuse was on January 20, 1863. Speakers included Rev. Samuel May and Rev. M.E. Strieby of the American Missionary Association. Between 1865 and 1877, while similar celebrations took place in Central New York, the holiday did not become an annual one.

Syracuse officially held its first Juneteenth celebration in 1988 and has celebrated the day ever since. Although limited by the COVID-19 pandemic, over the past couple of years, the celebration has been anchored by a parade that starts at the Dunbar Center and ends in Clinton Square. It is touted as one of the largest Juneteenth celebrations in the country. In 2020, the City of Syracuse and Onondaga County declared Juneteenth an official holiday.



Juneteenth Reflections

By Patty Naughton, Partner

I spent Juneteenth reflecting on historian David Blight’s famous 2015 piece in *The Atlantic*, “The Civil War Isn’t Over.” Blight wrote that “the great issues of the war were not resolved on that April morning when [the South surrendered] at Appomattox. In this sense, not only is the Civil War not over; it can still be lost.”

In retrospect, Blight’s thesis seems prescient. How could he have known then that, over the course of the next several years, an emboldened white supremacy would emerge from the peripheries of the national consciousness and stride ferociously into center stage? What I was wondering on June 19, 2021, was whether the war was indeed over, and whether the Union had lost.

I came of age in the 1960s, marching alongside my parents in sympathy for the fallen heroes of the Selma to Montgomery March. We celebrated when America adopted the great civil rights legislation of that decade: Title VII, the Fair Housing Act, and the Voting Rights Act. As the 1970s approached and the Vietnam War took over the national dialogue, I firmly believed that those laws, and the society that supported them, were also on a march, this one leading inexorably to racial equality—to an open, tolerant, and fair society.

That thought stayed with me for decades ... until the perfect storm made up of 21st century technology combined with a new brand of politician exposed my naïveté. Things like cell phone videos, depicting scenes of incomprehensible racial violence, and ever-present social media deftly manipulated to foment racial hatred for the sake of personal political gain, shredded the last fragile fiber of my idealism. America’s stirring commitment to “liberty and justice for all” seemed like some tattered Union flag, blowing aimlessly around a deserted battlefield after a Confederate victory.

So back to Blight and his *Atlantic* story: Can the Civil War be lost? Has it been lost already? I’m not sure of the answer, and the philosophical debate is better left to historians and other great thinkers.

But whatever their answer, there is clearly a battle raging. On Juneteenth, I reaffirmed my personal commitment to fight racial injustice; to celebrate the dignity residing in all humans regardless of color; and to spread a message of compassion and historical truth—hence, this reflection in *Voices of Excellence*.



Boys and Girls Club of Syracuse Celebrates Juneteenth

By Kayla Arias, Associate

Although many of the annual Juneteenth events in Syracuse were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, at least one community organization was able to set up a day of celebration on Syracuse’s west side. The Westside Boys and Girls Club still wanted to serve the community, and on Saturday, June 19, 2021, it held a ’90s–themed cookout, complete with a DJ and a live band, a costume competition, a fashion show, and much more. The cookout was attended by over 100 people in celebration of the holiday.

The Unstoppable Forces of Syracuse (the UFOS), a youth competitive dance team, performed at the Juneteenth cookout. The UFOS is run by Kenneth Elliott, who is my cousin. Kenneth is a prevention specialist with Syracuse Community Connections, a branch of the Southwest Community Center, and has volunteered with youth dance groups since he was a teenager. He founded the UFOS in 2020, and they compete locally as well as throughout the East Coast.

Pro Bono Corner

Our client, a senior citizen living below the poverty line, was referred to Barclay Damon by pro bono community partner Onondaga Volunteer Lawyers Project for pro bono legal representation to defend his real property rights. A Barclay Damon team—including [David Burch](#), [Courtney Merriman](#), and [Jade Rodriguez](#)—has prosecuted an action to quiet title in Oneida County Supreme Court against a developer who tore down and destroyed our client’s fence in order to develop the adjoining property for multifamily use. The team is working to complete all discovery and depositions. If he had not had pro bono representation in this matter, our client would not have had access to legal services necessary to preserve his private property rights.



David Burch
Partner



Courtney Merriman
Partner



Jade Rodriguez
Associate

Office Updates

Since many of Barclay Damon’s offices’ end-of-year charitable and community giving efforts are currently ramping up or ongoing, watch for more details in the next issue of Voices of Excellence.

ALBANY

Walk for Wildwood

Barclay Damon sponsored the Walk for Wildwood, which helps raise money to sustain Wildwood’s programming for over 3,000 individuals and their families with developmental disabilities in the Capital Region. [Margaret Surowka](#) and her dog participated in the walk, which took place on September 25, 2021.

Justice for All Campaign

[David Cost](#) co-chaired the Justice for All Campaign for the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York. This year’s campaign focused on mitigating the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on many families and ensuring that all area families had access to legal services to protect their rights. Barclay Damon was also, again, a lead campaign supporter of the campaign, which kicked off on September 30, 2021.

SYRACUSE

Barclay Damon Is a Pro Bono Champion!

[Gabrielle Figueroa](#) and Barclay Damon were selected by the Volunteer Lawyers Project of CNY as 2021 Pro Bono Champion Award winners. Gabby was honored with the Pro Bono Coordinator Award for her work coordinating pro bono services, and Barclay Damon was honored with the Family Court Clinic Award for our commitment to the Volunteer Lawyers Project of CNY’s Family Court Clinic. The awards were presented at the second annual Cheers for a Cause Fundraiser held on September 30, 2021.

BUFFALO

Three Barclay Damon Attorneys Named to US District Court for the Western District of New York Pro Bono Honor Roll

[Mike Ferdman](#), [Megan Bahas](#), and [Sarah O’Brien](#) were recognized by Chief Judge Elizabeth Wolford and named to the inaugural US District Court for the Western New York Pro Bono Honor Roll for providing pro bono representation in the district from January 1, 2020, to June 30, 2021. Since April 1, 2020, the court has appointed pro bono counsel to eligible pro se litigants in over 30 civil cases.

Office Updates continued

Barclay Damon Plays Kickball to Support Spirited Athletes Bold at Heart (SABAH)



[Ryan Altieri](#), Jonathan Atlikhani, [Ari Goldberg](#), Liz Krajnik, [Sarah O'Brien](#), and several non-Barclay Damon team members participated in the fifth annual Kickstock kickball

tournament on August 28, 2021, to support Spirited Athletes Bold at Heart (SABAH). A SABAH athlete named Olivia, who was also the Barclay Damon team's coach, helped the team reach the playoffs. Unfortunately, in a tiebreaker loss to New Kicks on the Block, the team didn't make it to the semifinals. On a happy note, over \$50,000 was raised to benefit SABAH.

ROCHESTER

34th Annual A Salute to Veterans Golf Tournament

On July 26, 2021, the foursome of [Glenn Pezzulo](#), [Michael Dehmler](#), [Corey Auerbach](#), and [Steve Tranelli](#) (pictured left to right), participated in the 34th annual A Salute to Veterans Golf Tournament hosted by CDS Wolf Foundation in support of Warrior Salute Veteran Services at the historic Oak Hill Country Club in Pittsford, NY. Warrior Salute Veteran Services provides veterans with transitional housing and personalized support at no cost to the veteran.



DEI Award

This year, the annual Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Award was presented to [Cassandra Rich](#) by [Mark Whitford](#) at the DEI State



of the Firm event on October 20, 2021. The award is given annually to someone who demonstrates ongoing effort to support firm DEI initiatives and who embodies a spirit of welcoming and inclusion to others at the firm. Despite joining the firm right before the COVID-19 shutdown, Cassie was recognized for diving into the Rochester DLT and assisting in organizing efforts like a lunch 'n' learn on redlining discrimination, a collection effort for the Bivona Child Advocacy Center, and a local park cleanup for the Rochester office community day.

MAJOR MARKETS

New Haven

LAA Housing Campaign

The New Haven office contributed to the New Haven Legal Assistance Association's (LAA) housing campaign. In total, the campaign raised over \$160,000. LAA will use the funds to increase staffing and serve New Haven residents facing eviction and homelessness. Barclay Damon supported the campaign by donating \$2,000. Fundraisers' generosity in contributing to the campaign was recognized on November 17, 2021, at a reception held at the Elm City Club in New Haven.